

Breastfeeding and travel

Breast milk is instantly on hand and contains immune factors, so it is the safest drink for your baby while travelling. If your baby is exclusively breastfed, you won't have to worry about suspect water supplies and sterilising bottles either.

Travelling outside major centres in developing nations with a baby is not recommended for various reasons, including the risk of disease and the difficulties in getting access to suitable medical facilities.

Be culturally sensitive

Most families with babies are travelling to visit and stay with family and friends. If this is the case, you will most likely be aware of what is considered normal in the country you are visiting. Babies are welcome in most places and can be a great way of helping you interact with people you may meet on your travels.

Breastfeeding in public is generally accepted, but may be considered offensive in some countries. Check beforehand with the Australian Embassy or the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A discreetly placed bunny rug or shawl is very useful.

Immunisation concerns

See your doctor to discuss vaccinations. You may be advised to give your baby the routine vaccinations earlier. Research suggests that vaccinations are safe for both the mother and her baby. However, it is not possible to vaccinate a newborn against diseases such as yellow fever, and breast milk will only offer limited protection. Unless your situation demands travel, it may be wiser to postpone your trip until your baby is older.

Anti-malarial drugs

If you are travelling to a destination where malaria is present, you will need to take anti-malarial drugs. Small amounts of medication will be passed to your baby through your breast milk. This is not thought to be harmful. However, the medication your baby receives in milk will not be enough to protect them against malaria. Discuss with your doctor before you travel which medications and dosages will be suitable for your baby.

While travelling, take extra care to avoid mosquito bites. Suggestions include:

- Choose long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Make sure your baby's skin is well covered with clothes.
- Wear insect repellent.
- Be careful not to put insect repellent on your baby's hands, as they may swallow the lotion if they suck their fingers.
- Use insect sprays or mosquito coils in your room.
- Both you and your baby should sleep under mosquito nets.

Other medications

Both prescription and over-the-counter medications can be passed to your baby through your breast milk. Only take medications prescribed or recommended by your doctor who knows you are breastfeeding. If possible, take with you all the (safe) over-the-counter drugs you think you may need for the duration of your trip. Remember that other countries may not stock familiar brands, and what you assume to be a suitable substitute may not be a good thing to take while breastfeeding.

You may experience a drop in milk supply

Your milk supply may temporarily decrease at some times during your trip. This could be due to dehydration after flying or illness (such as travellers' diarrhoea) or simply fewer opportunities to breastfeed.

It may help if you:

- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids, especially on long distance flights
- Avoid caffeinated drinks
- Don't smoke
- Avoid smoky environments
- Get adequate rest
- Plan plenty of rest/feed breaks
- Continue to breastfeed, but increase your water intake if you get travellers' diarrhoea.

Some helpful tips

Suggestions include:

- Ask friends or your travel agent for advice on child-friendly airlines. Some airlines are more accommodating than others.
- Ask your travel agent for suggestions on airline travel with children.
- Speak directly with the airline, as some companies are more accommodating and helpful.
- Be aware that water does not come to a full boil on aeroplanes. Make sure you can breastfeed or take sterile water with you if needing to make up artificial formula for each feed.
- If you are unsure of the availability of baby products at your destination, take enough supplies to last you the entire trip. Take sachets of an oral rehydration product (to treat fluid and electrolyte loss) in case you or your baby develops diarrhoea.
- If your baby does get diarrhoea when travelling, keep breastfeeding. It is fine to go back to exclusive breastfeeding for a while until your baby recovers.
- If you express milk, take your own equipment (such as breast pump) with you. Don't forget to take a power point adaptor if your breast pump is electric.
- If you are travelling alone, ask the airline if it is possible to have an 'assistant' who will help you at each stop. For example, the staff member might collect your luggage and help you on and off the plane.
- While travelling by plane, try to time your baby's feeds so they are drinking during take-off and landing. This will reduce the likelihood of ear pain triggered by the changes in cabin pressure.
- Thieves tend to target women travelling with young children simply because mothers are often distracted and not able to hold onto their handbags. Carry your valuables on your body, such as in a neck pouch or belt worn next to the skin.
- Travelling with your baby in a sling or specific backpack baby carrier can make it easier to get around in large travel centres including airports, train stations and bus terminals. You will also know exactly where your baby or toddler is and that they are safe and secure where they can gain comfort from being close to you.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- A lactation consultant – contact the Australian Lactation Consultants Association
- Australian Breastfeeding Association Breastfeeding Helpline Tel. 1800 686 2 686
- Travel agent
- Airline
- Australian embassies
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Tel. (03) 9221 5555
- Travel guidebook with information on travelling with children

Things to remember

- Breastfeeding in public is considered offensive in a few countries, so check beforehand to avoid unpleasant attention.
- Travelling outside major centres in developing nations with a baby is not recommended for various reasons, including the risk of disease and the difficulties in getting access to suitable medical facilities.
- Dehydration and illness (such as travellers' diarrhoea) may reduce your milk supply.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Australian Breastfeeding Association

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